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### **Sarah Coakley and the Future of Systematic Theology, ed. Janice McRandal**

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Janice McRandal (ed.), *Sarah Coakley and the Future of Systematic Theology*, Fortress: Minneapolis MN, 2016; 254 pp: 978-1-5064-0806-4, \$79 (hbk)

Bringing together scholars from Australia, New Zealand and the United States, this is the first whole volume appraising the work of Sarah Coakley, who is undoubtedly one of the world's most prominent theologians. Chapters address contemplative prayer and the spiritual senses, bodily practice, theological method, ecclesiology and power. The volume ends with a full and accurate list of Coakley's publications to date.

For readers with interests in spiritual practice, the contributions of Benjamin Myers, Annette Pierdziwol and the editor will be of particular interest. Myers commends Coakley's attention to the doctrine of the spiritual senses, which suggests that the ordinary senses that perceive objects around us may, through training, become attuned to higher spiritual truths. Nonetheless, following Origen he argues that such training needs to be grounded at least as much in biblical reading as in a mysticism beyond words. In a substantial ethical discussion, Pierdziwol offers a powerful account of how spiritual practice may provide the concrete setting for the transformative interpersonal encounters upon which Levinas bases his ethics but which, in his own expositions, typically appear devoid of context. McRandal identifies spiritual practice with what Foucault terms 'practices of the self', suggesting that, by relating these to an epistemology that acknowledges a source of transformation outside of the self, Coakley is better able to understand them and the transformations they effect.

Notwithstanding Nicola Hoggard Creegan's chapter, which argues that Coakley effectively extends Schleiermacher's concern with religious consciousness by thinking through its doctrinal implications more seriously, no contributor directly examines her early major engagement with the christology of Ernst Troeltsch. Positive yet critical, this sets the direction for Coakley's *théologie totale* and justifies her use of historical and social scientific methodology, as well as the value she places on feeling and on insights from psychology. Troeltsch is also important for understanding Coakley's critique of so-called 'classic' Chalcedonian christology, which, unlike the Council of Chalcedon itself, takes all questions to have been fully resolved. These methodological commitments provide the context for her exposition of Gregory of Nyssa, which is subjected to sharp textual challenge by Dennis Jowers. Ultimately, however, christology must have an immanentist aspect because, like any theory, it is a construct of human reason and experience, whether these be mediated by scripture or by some other form of divine revelation.

Stephen Burns's chapter includes a useful overview of the progress of women into professorships in theology in UK universities, even if Marcella Althaus-Reid, appointed at Edinburgh in 2006, is missing. However, unlike most of the women listed, Coakley has never allied herself with feminism, opting instead to be identified with the theological mainstream. It is therefore little surprise that two of the more critical treatments in this volume are on gender and sexuality. Drawing on Yoder, who from these standpoints is himself a problematic figure, Myles Werntz contends that Coakley's absorption with contemplative prayer and personal spiritual practice, rather than with collective ecclesial life, results in her remaining locked into a narrative of individual mastery. However, this position is undercut by Matthew John Paul Tan, who rightly recognizes that such prayer and practice, being embodied, may be socially fulfilled. Brandy Daniels argues that, because of Coakley's high investment in spiritual practice, the integrity of the sacred and the disciplines of knowledge as classically constructed, she fails to recognize that, at the margins, messy bricolage and at least partial failure are the reality, rather than the confident colonization of classic theological and spiritual sites. However, many of the mystics who have inspired Coakley were subjected to censure or persecution in their own day, and in drawing on their epistemology, Coakley acknowledges limitation too.

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